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IMPRESSIONS OF
Westminster Abbey
An Illustrated Text to accompany
Seven Etchings by
A. H. HAIG



LONDON
ROBERT DUNTHORNE
At the Rembrandt Head
IN VIGO STREET
1885





IMPRESSIONS OF WESTMINSTER ABBEY.



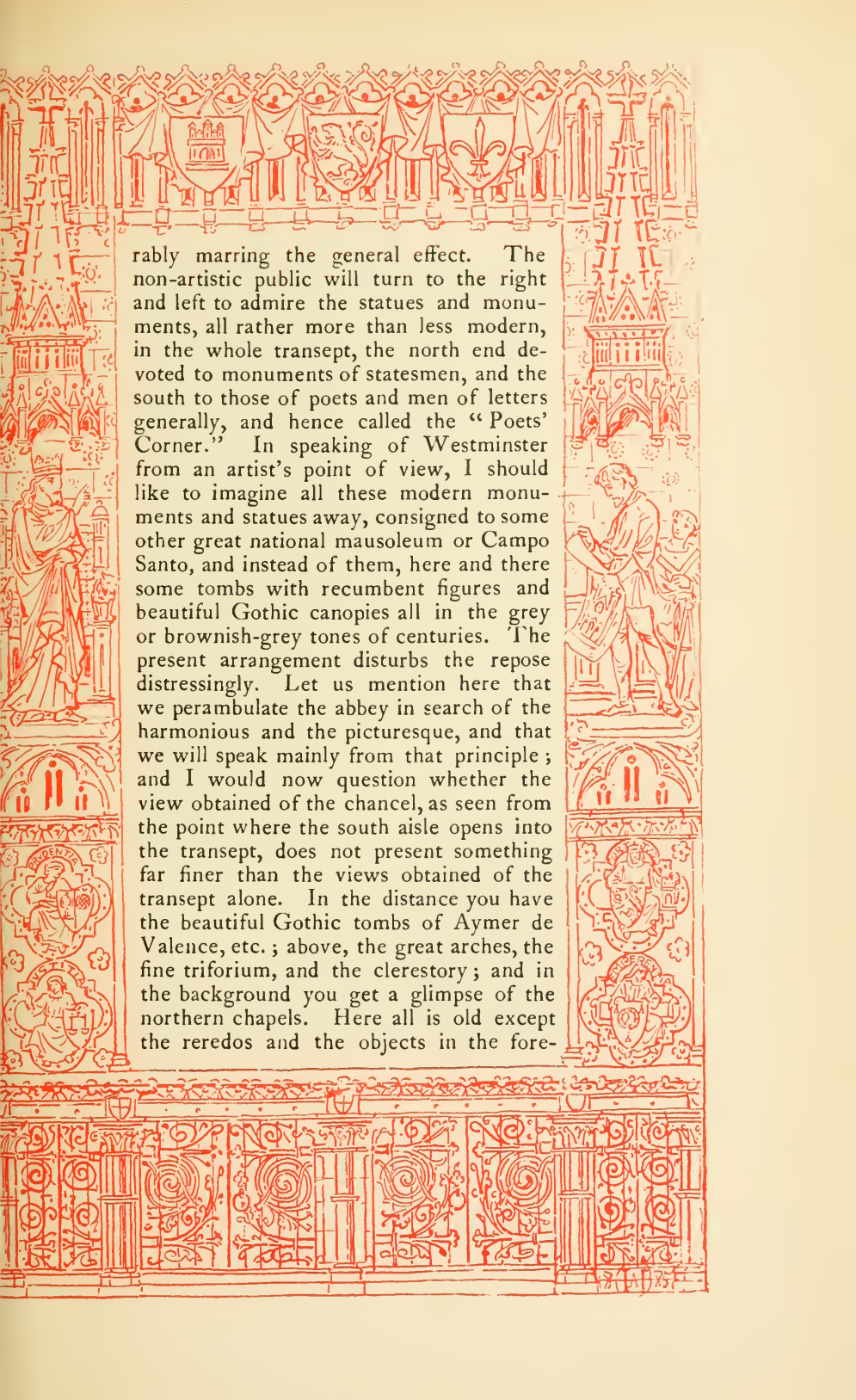
To all English-speaking people no name of any ancient building is probably more familiar or more venerable than that of the Great Abbey which Edward the Confessor founded at Westminster and dedicated to St. Peter in 1050 ; that is, at any rate, the period given without any historical doubt. Legendary history assigns the foundation to King Lucius in the second century, or to King Sebert in the early part of the seventh, with the picturesque stories of the fisherman Edric and his vision of St. Peter, whose consecration of the abbey, assisted by angels and the heavenly choir, caused it to be dedicated to that saint, etc., etc. But as far as these few notes, originally written in the form of a letter to a friend, are concerned, we have to deal only with real history. Another time we may have an opportunity to deal with the legends.

To the strangers of any race visiting

London, Westminster Abbey becomes one of the first points of attraction, engaging a more general sympathy than even the Tower or St. Paul's. The Shrine of St. Edward, the grand tombs of kings and princes, priests and warriors, the monuments of famous statesmen and men of science, and last, but not least, the sanctuary of the poets and men of letters who from Chaucer down to modern days have ennobled the language and glorified the country; all this, and more, will ever make the old abbey worthy of a pilgrimage from far-off countries.

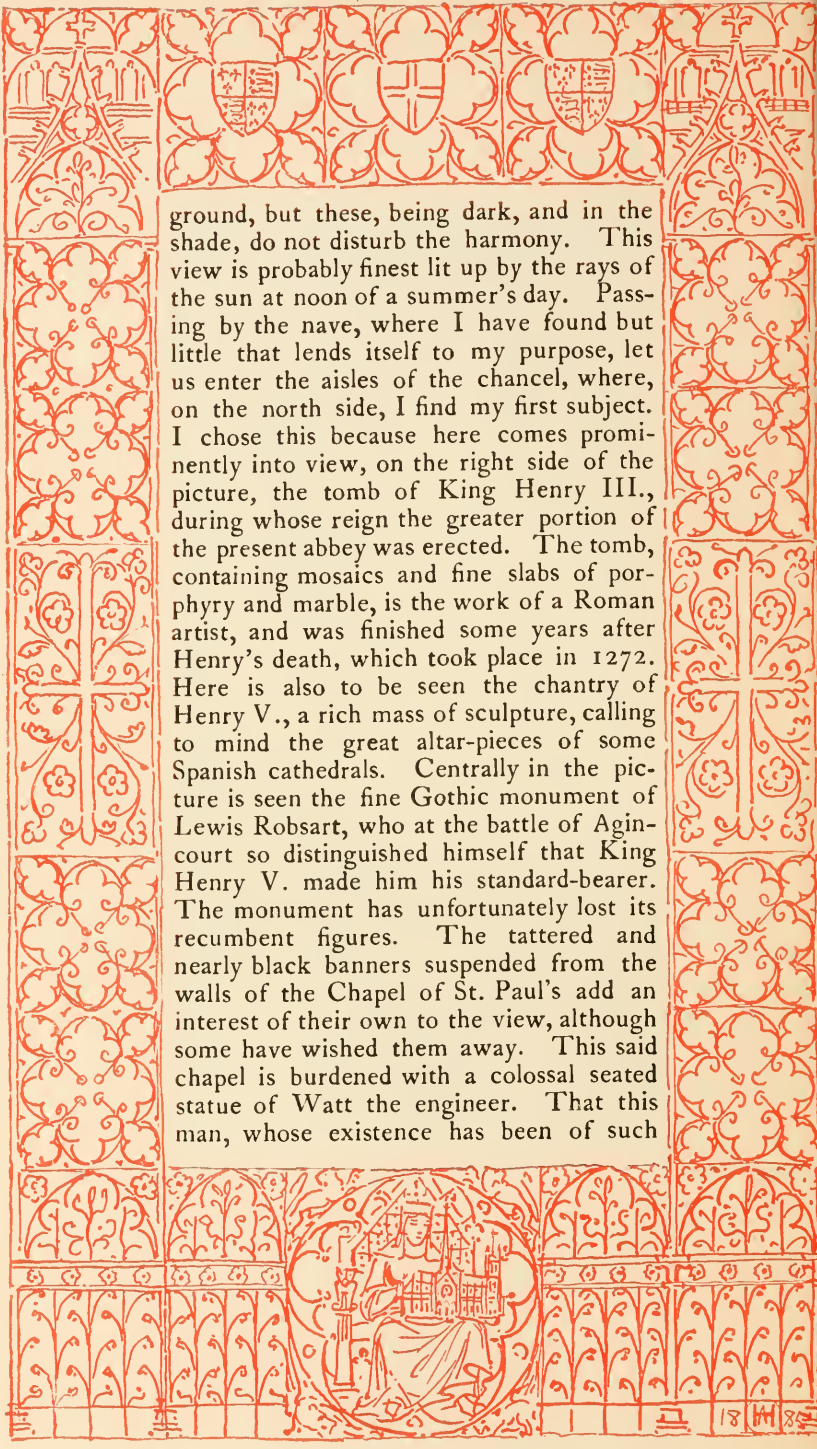
To the not too critical stranger all will be glorious, and to the thoughtful archæologist and artist all will be interesting, even should it be felt impossible to admit that the memories of so many famous men have here always been perpetuated in the best manner or in the best taste. We shall have something more to say about the monuments presently, but let us first contemplate the abbey as a building, not in the complete sense of an architectural analysis, but rather as a first impression upon the artistic mind. Let us enter by the North Porch, the only one now used in this year of grace 1885, when the dynamite scare has caused to be closed to the public the West Entrance, as well as that by the Poets' Corner. The great transept in all its length will be before us, and impressive enough it is in its proportions; the white marble statues, busts, and monumental slabs, however, conside-






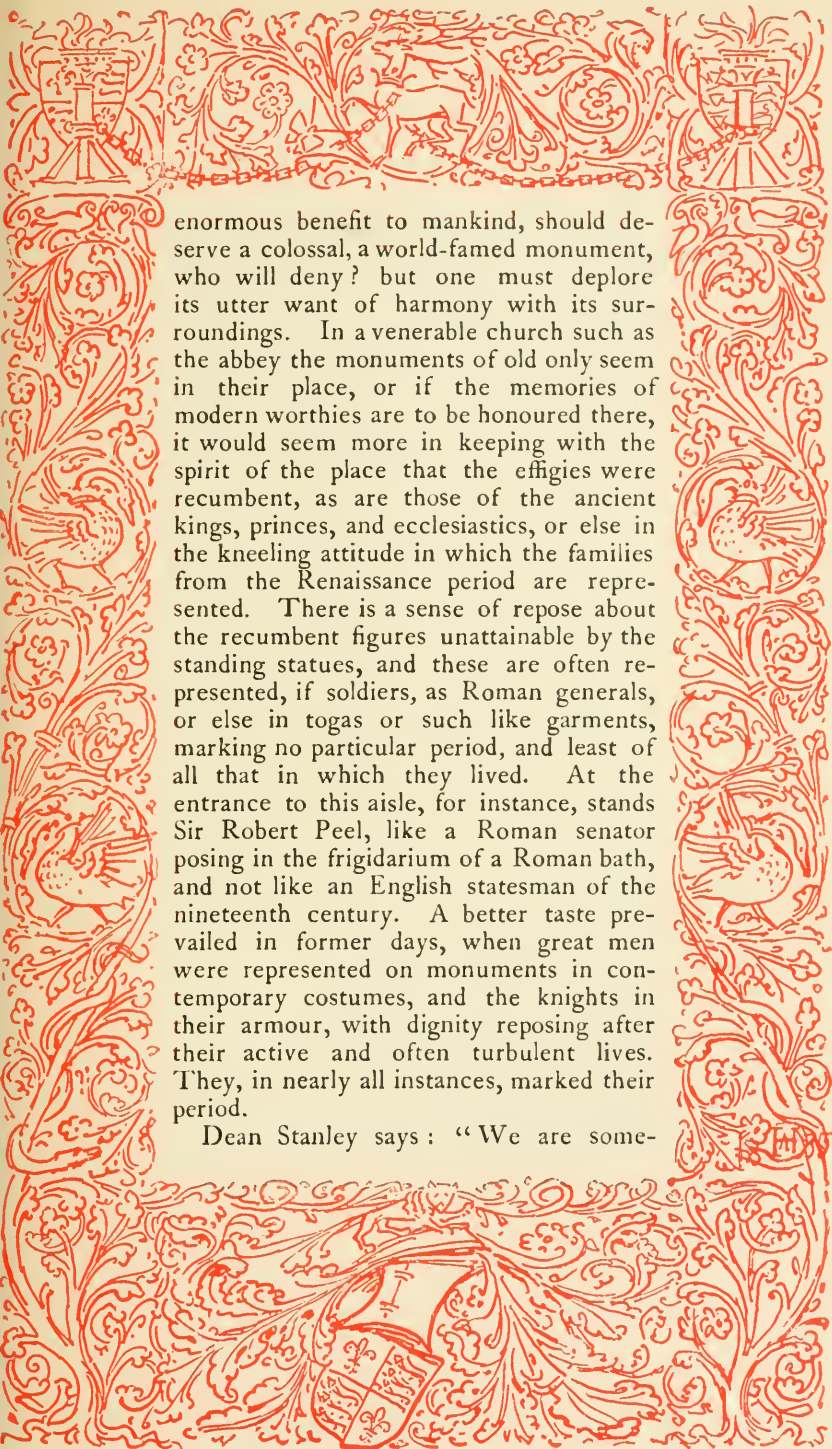
ably marring the general effect. The non-artistic public will turn to the right and left to admire the statues and monuments, all rather more than less modern, in the whole transept, the north end devoted to monuments of statesmen, and the south to those of poets and men of letters generally, and hence called the "Poets' Corner." In speaking of Westminster from an artist's point of view, I should like to imagine all these modern monuments and statues away, consigned to some other great national mausoleum or Campo Santo, and instead of them, here and there some tombs with recumbent figures and beautiful Gothic canopies all in the grey or brownish-grey tones of centuries. The present arrangement disturbs the repose distressingly. Let us mention here that we perambulate the abbey in search of the harmonious and the picturesque, and that we will speak mainly from that principle; and I would now question whether the view obtained of the chancel, as seen from the point where the south aisle opens into the transept, does not present something far finer than the views obtained of the transept alone. In the distance you have the beautiful Gothic tombs of Aymer de Valence, etc.; above, the great arches, the fine triforium, and the clerestory; and in the background you get a glimpse of the northern chapels. Here all is old except the reredos and the objects in the fore-





ground, but these, being dark, and in the shade, do not disturb the harmony. This view is probably finest lit up by the rays of the sun at noon of a summer's day. Passing by the nave, where I have found but little that lends itself to my purpose, let us enter the aisles of the chancel, where, on the north side, I find my first subject. I chose this because here comes prominently into view, on the right side of the picture, the tomb of King Henry III., during whose reign the greater portion of the present abbey was erected. The tomb, containing mosaics and fine slabs of porphyry and marble, is the work of a Roman artist, and was finished some years after Henry's death, which took place in 1272. Here is also to be seen the chantry of Henry V., a rich mass of sculpture, calling to mind the great altar-pieces of some Spanish cathedrals. Centrally in the picture is seen the fine Gothic monument of Lewis Robsart, who at the battle of Agincourt so distinguished himself that King Henry V. made him his standard-bearer. The monument has unfortunately lost its recumbent figures. The tattered and nearly black banners suspended from the walls of the Chapel of St. Paul's add an interest of their own to the view, although some have wished them away. This said chapel is burdened with a colossal seated statue of Watt the engineer. That this man, whose existence has been of such



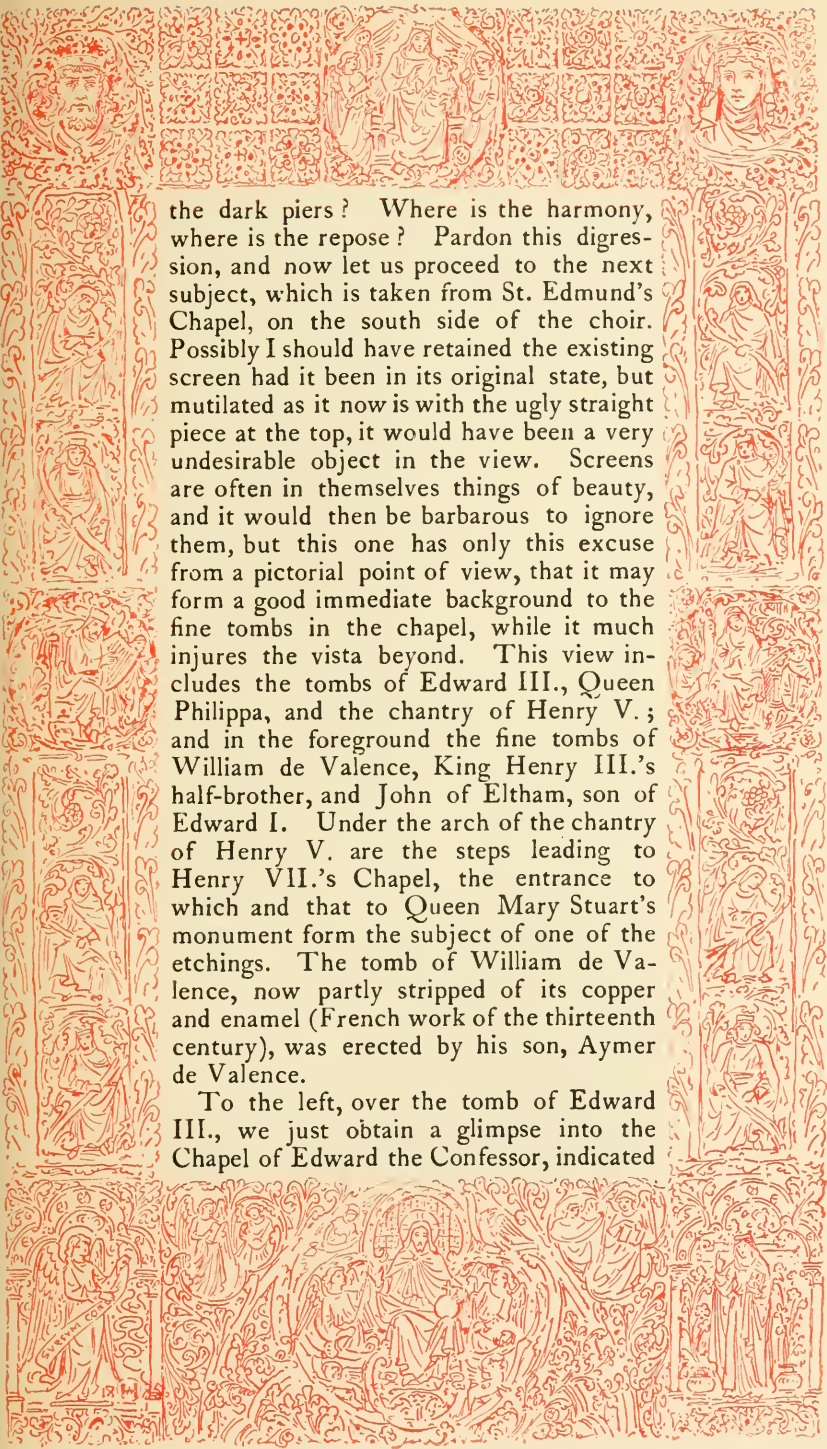


enormous benefit to mankind, should deserve a colossal, a world-famed monument, who will deny? but one must deplore its utter want of harmony with its surroundings. In a venerable church such as the abbey the monuments of old only seem in their place, or if the memories of modern worthies are to be honoured there, it would seem more in keeping with the spirit of the place that the effigies were recumbent, as are those of the ancient kings, princes, and ecclesiastics, or else in the kneeling attitude in which the families from the Renaissance period are represented. There is a sense of repose about the recumbent figures unattainable by the standing statues, and these are often represented, if soldiers, as Roman generals, or else in togas or such like garments, marking no particular period, and least of all that in which they lived. At the entrance to this aisle, for instance, stands Sir Robert Peel, like a Roman senator posing in the frigidarium of a Roman bath, and not like an English statesman of the nineteenth century. A better taste prevailed in former days, when great men were represented on monuments in contemporary costumes, and the knights in their armour, with dignity reposing after their active and often turbulent lives. They, in nearly all instances, marked their period.

Dean Stanley says : "We are some-

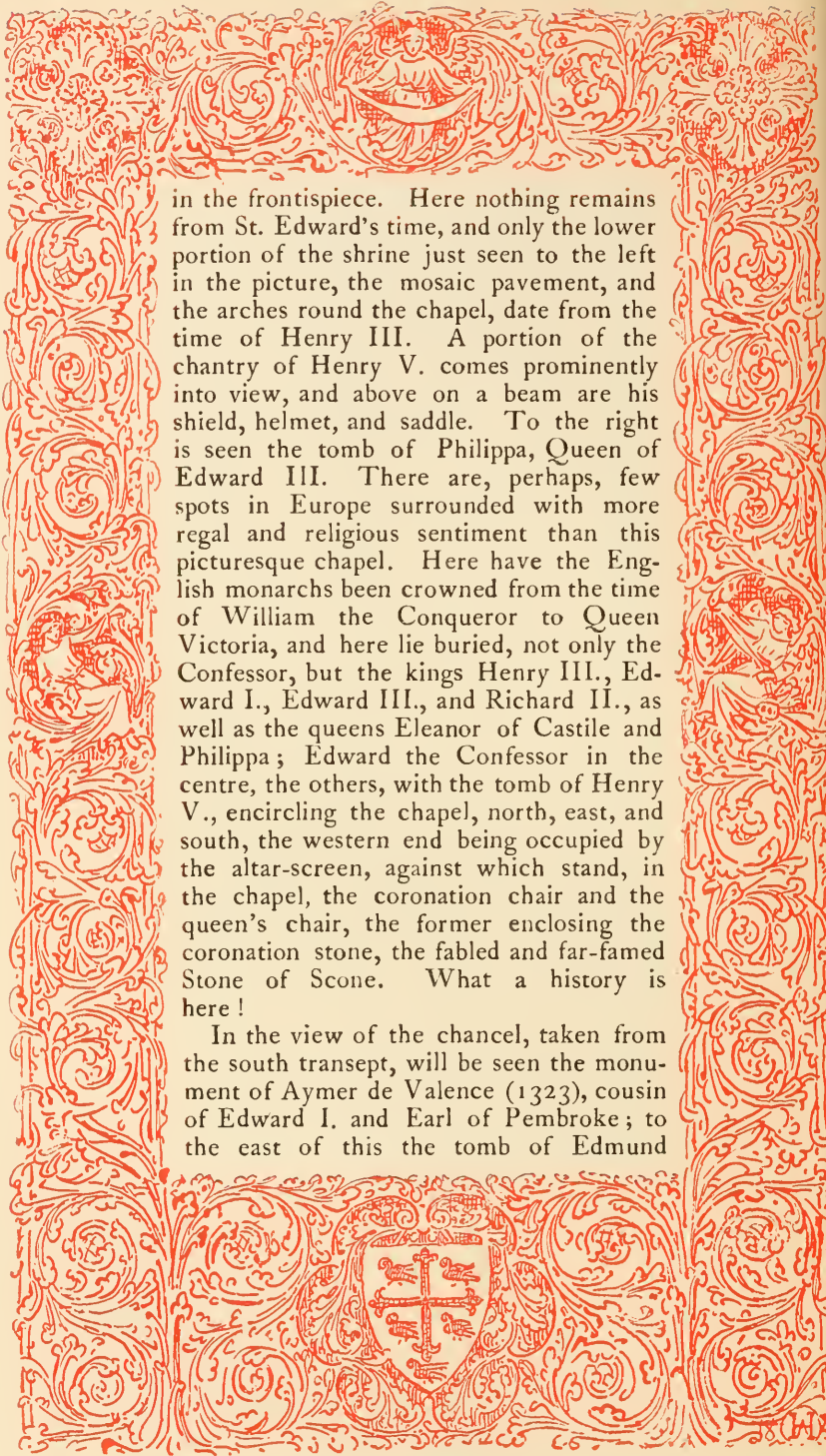
times inclined bitterly to contrast the placid dignity of our recumbent kings, with Chatham gesticulating from the northern transept, or Pitt from the western door, or Shakespeare leaning on his column in the Poets' Corner, or Wolfe expiring by the Chapel of St. John. But, in fact, they are, in their different ways, keeping guard over the shrine of our monarchs and our laws, and their very incongruity and variety become symbols of the harmonious diversity in unity which pervades our whole commonwealth." True, from such a purely historic point of view. But to the architect's and painter's vision more agreeable would it be were it still possible to see the beautiful arcading, glorious with delicate carving, more uninterruptedly running round the lower part of the interior walls, or at least less mutilated and obscured by a host of often very ugly monumental slabs, inferior statues, and all sorts of things, commemorating certainly now and then noble men and women, but right often also names whose memories could very well have been satisfied with the honours given to mortals in the ordinary public cemeteries. And even speaking of men whose memories before all others deserve to be kept green, poets and other men of genius, is it a right or a beautiful thing to put such a bust as that of Burns, for instance, where it now is placed, or that of Longfellow or the late Archbishop of Canterbury, all glaringly white, on brackets projecting from





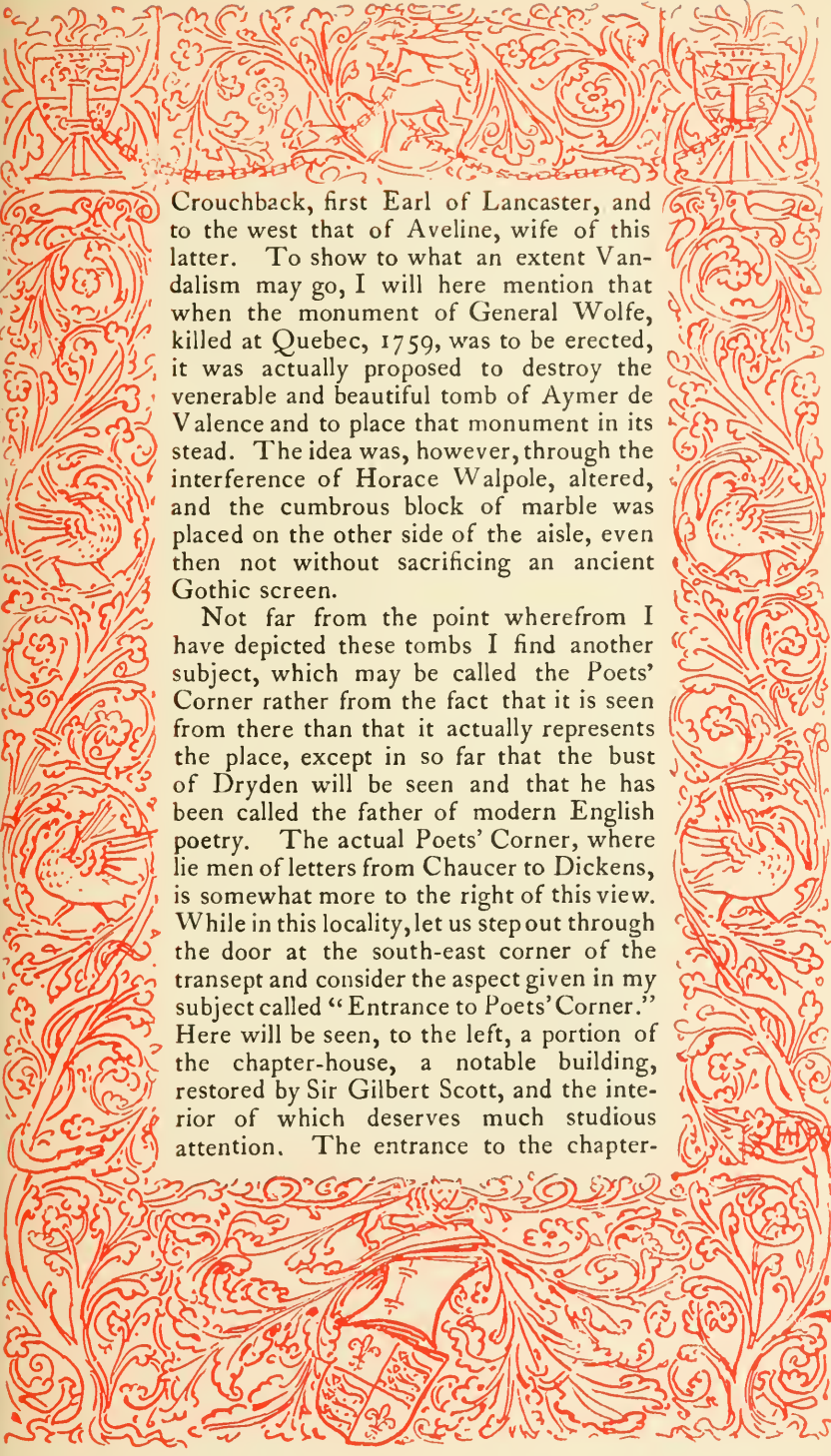
the dark piers? Where is the harmony, where is the repose? Pardon this digression, and now let us proceed to the next subject, which is taken from St. Edmund's Chapel, on the south side of the choir. Possibly I should have retained the existing screen had it been in its original state, but mutilated as it now is with the ugly straight piece at the top, it would have been a very undesirable object in the view. Screens are often in themselves things of beauty, and it would then be barbarous to ignore them, but this one has only this excuse from a pictorial point of view, that it may form a good immediate background to the fine tombs in the chapel, while it much injures the vista beyond. This view includes the tombs of Edward III., Queen Philippa, and the chantry of Henry V.; and in the foreground the fine tombs of William de Valence, King Henry III.'s half-brother, and John of Eltham, son of Edward I. Under the arch of the chantry of Henry V. are the steps leading to Henry VII.'s Chapel, the entrance to which and that to Queen Mary Stuart's monument form the subject of one of the etchings. The tomb of William de Valence, now partly stripped of its copper and enamel (French work of the thirteenth century), was erected by his son, Aymer de Valence.

To the left, over the tomb of Edward III., we just obtain a glimpse into the Chapel of Edward the Confessor, indicated



in the frontispiece. Here nothing remains from St. Edward's time, and only the lower portion of the shrine just seen to the left in the picture, the mosaic pavement, and the arches round the chapel, date from the time of Henry III. A portion of the chantry of Henry V. comes prominently into view, and above on a beam are his shield, helmet, and saddle. To the right is seen the tomb of Philippa, Queen of Edward III. There are, perhaps, few spots in Europe surrounded with more regal and religious sentiment than this picturesque chapel. Here have the English monarchs been crowned from the time of William the Conqueror to Queen Victoria, and here lie buried, not only the Confessor, but the kings Henry III., Edward I., Edward III., and Richard II., as well as the queens Eleanor of Castile and Philippa; Edward the Confessor in the centre, the others, with the tomb of Henry V., encircling the chapel, north, east, and south, the western end being occupied by the altar-screen, against which stand, in the chapel, the coronation chair and the queen's chair, the former enclosing the coronation stone, the fabled and far-famed Stone of Scone. What a history is here!

In the view of the chancel, taken from the south transept, will be seen the monument of Aymer de Valence (1323), cousin of Edward I. and Earl of Pembroke; to the east of this the tomb of Edmund



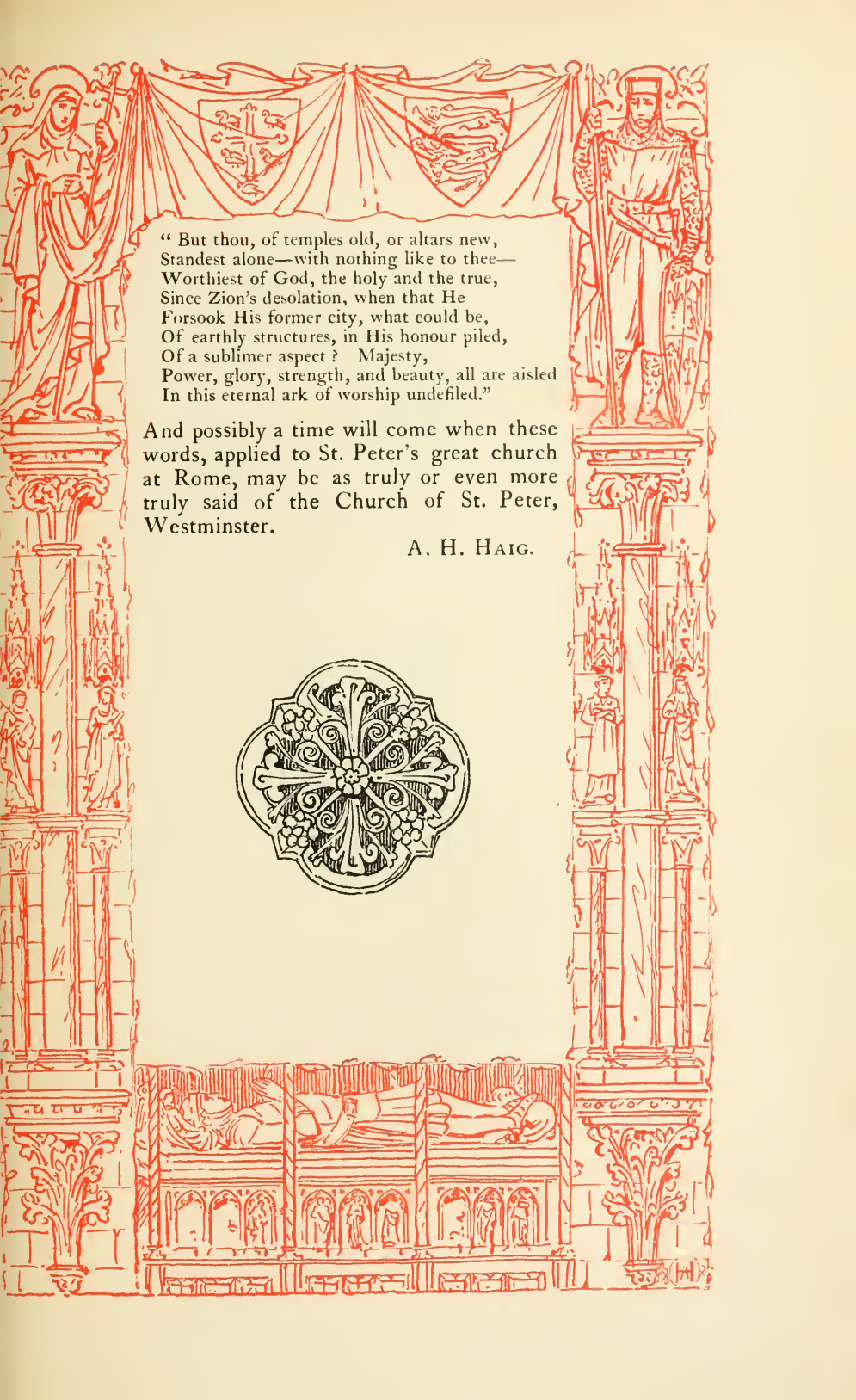
Crouchback, first Earl of Lancaster, and to the west that of Aveline, wife of this latter. To show to what an extent Vandalism may go, I will here mention that when the monument of General Wolfe, killed at Quebec, 1759, was to be erected, it was actually proposed to destroy the venerable and beautiful tomb of Aymer de Valence and to place that monument in its stead. The idea was, however, through the interference of Horace Walpole, altered, and the cumbrous block of marble was placed on the other side of the aisle, even then not without sacrificing an ancient Gothic screen.

Not far from the point wherefrom I have depicted these tombs I find another subject, which may be called the Poets' Corner rather from the fact that it is seen from there than that it actually represents the place, except in so far that the bust of Dryden will be seen and that he has been called the father of modern English poetry. The actual Poets' Corner, where lie men of letters from Chaucer to Dickens, is somewhat more to the right of this view. While in this locality, let us step out through the door at the south-east corner of the transept and consider the aspect given in my subject called "Entrance to Poets' Corner." Here will be seen, to the left, a portion of the chapter-house, a notable building, restored by Sir Gilbert Scott, and the interior of which deserves much studious attention. The entrance to the chapter-

house from the cloisters has been beautiful, and is a picturesque object now in its much mutilated condition, but its rendering I have avoided, owing to the depressed form of the low arches, which, to my thinking, mars the otherwise pleasing impression of the whole. But the nature of the cloisters themselves is shown in a sketch from the south-western corner, perhaps the latest part of the quadrangle.

Within the compass of the very few remarks I have here ventured to offer, I have been able to indicate only a few of the many charming attractions of the abbey and its precincts. Indeed, I feel ashamed of the poverty of these indications; on the other hand, when such works as those by Sir Gilbert Scott, Dean Stanley, and other learned writers and historians are to be had, I have thought it best to confine myself almost entirely to such points as are in connection with my pictorial treatment of the abbey. These few "foot-prints on the sands of time" may easily be obliterated by the feet of other wanderers, who may be, as I have been, impressed by the sublimity of the venerable Abbey of Westminster, tempered by a sense of regret for so many inharmonious additions, or for what it has lost through reckless mutilations. No doubt we could at one time have said with Byron—for whom, by the way, I in vain search in the aisles of Westminster—





“ But thou, of temples old, or altars new,
Standest alone—with nothing like to thee—
Worthiest of God, the holy and the true,
Since Zion’s desolation, when that He
Forsook His former city, what could be,
Of earthly structures, in His honour piled,
Of a sublimer aspect? Majesty,
Power, glory, strength, and beauty, all are aisled
In this eternal ark of worship undefiled.”

And possibly a time will come when these words, applied to St. Peter’s great church at Rome, may be as truly or even more truly said of the Church of St. Peter, Westminster.

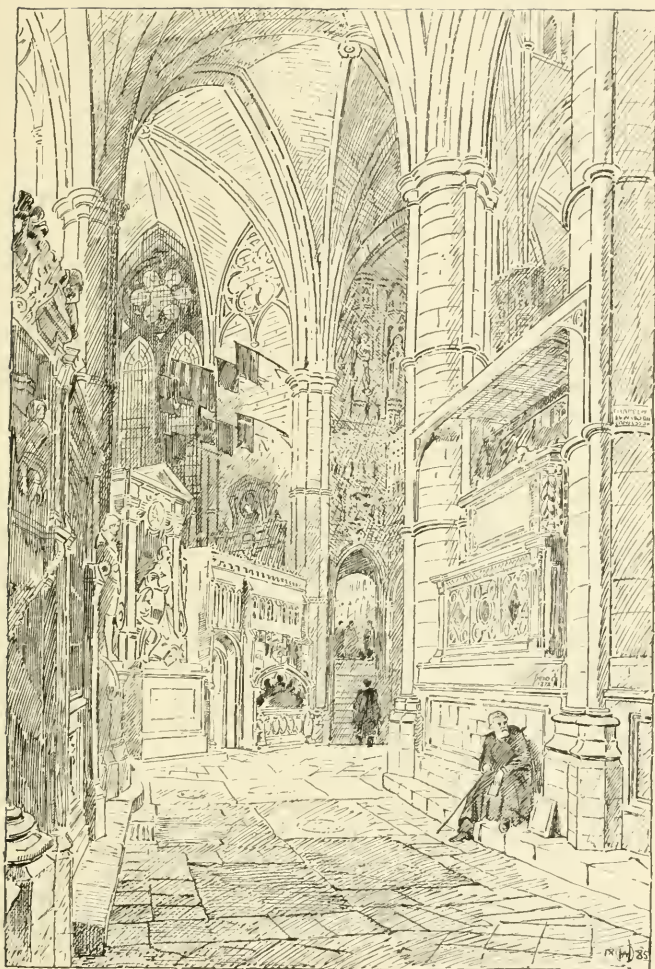
A. H. HAIG.



LIST OF THE ETCHINGS,

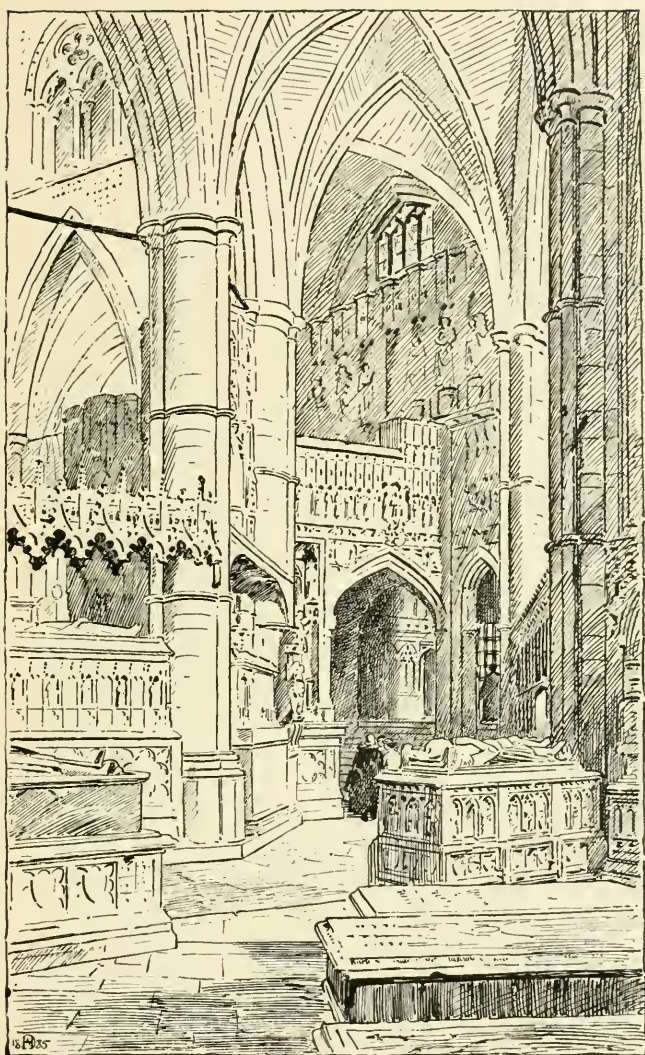
SKETCHES OF WHICH FOLLOW.

- No. 1. The North Chancel Aisle.
- „ 2. View from St. Edmund's Chapel.
- „ 3. Entrance to Poets' Corner.
- „ 4. A Dark Corner. (Entrance to
South Aisle of Henry VII.'s
Chapel.)
- „ 5. Poets' Corner.
- „ 6. View of Chancel from South
Transept.
- „ 7. The Cloisters.



Size $15\frac{1}{4}$ in. \times $23\frac{1}{2}$ in.

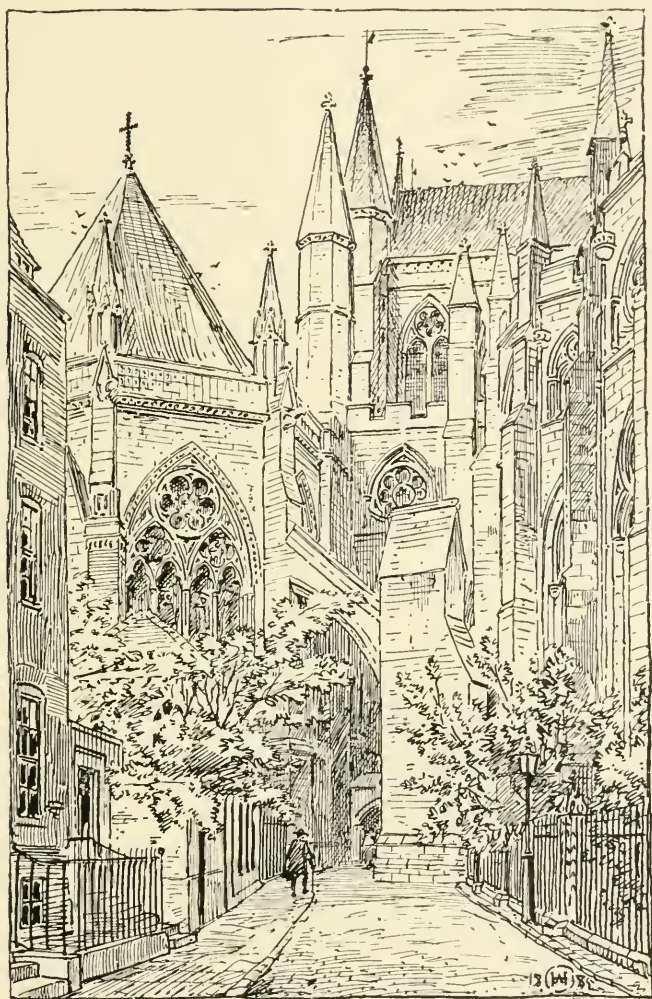
THE NORTH CHANCEL AISLE.



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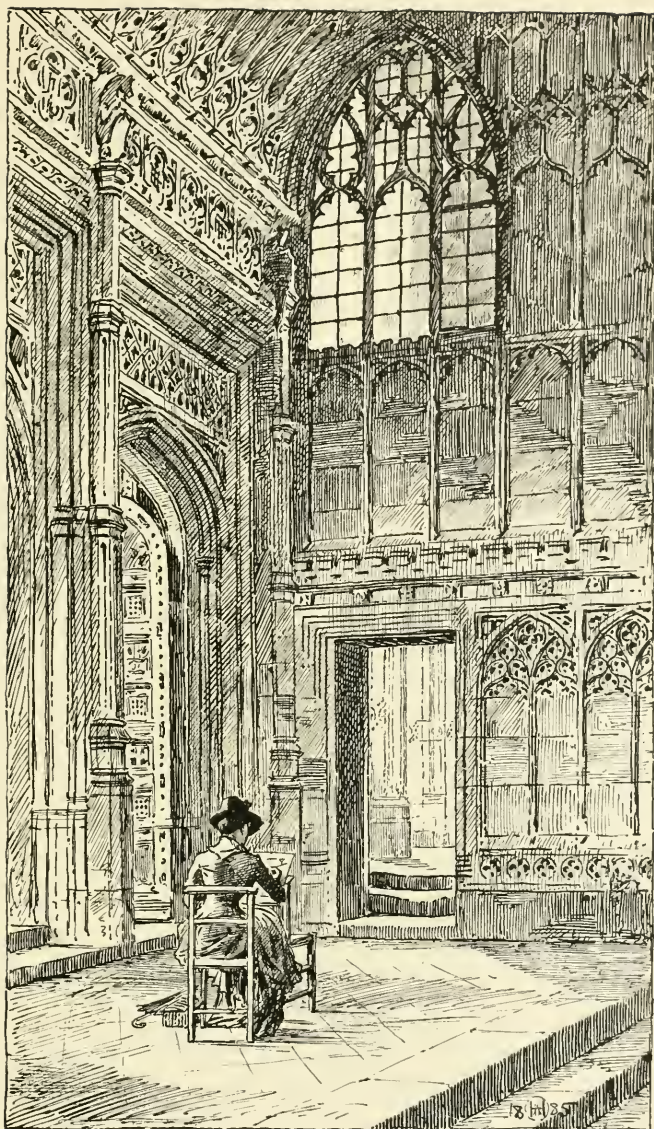
VIEW FROM ST. EDMUND'S CHAPEL.





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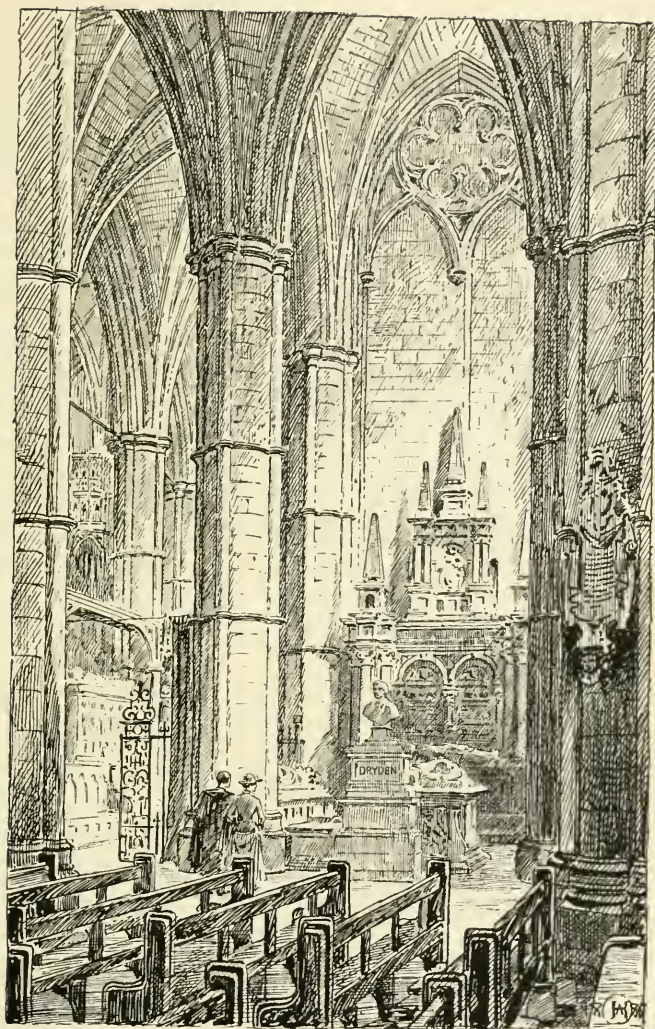
ENTRANCE TO POETS' CORNER.



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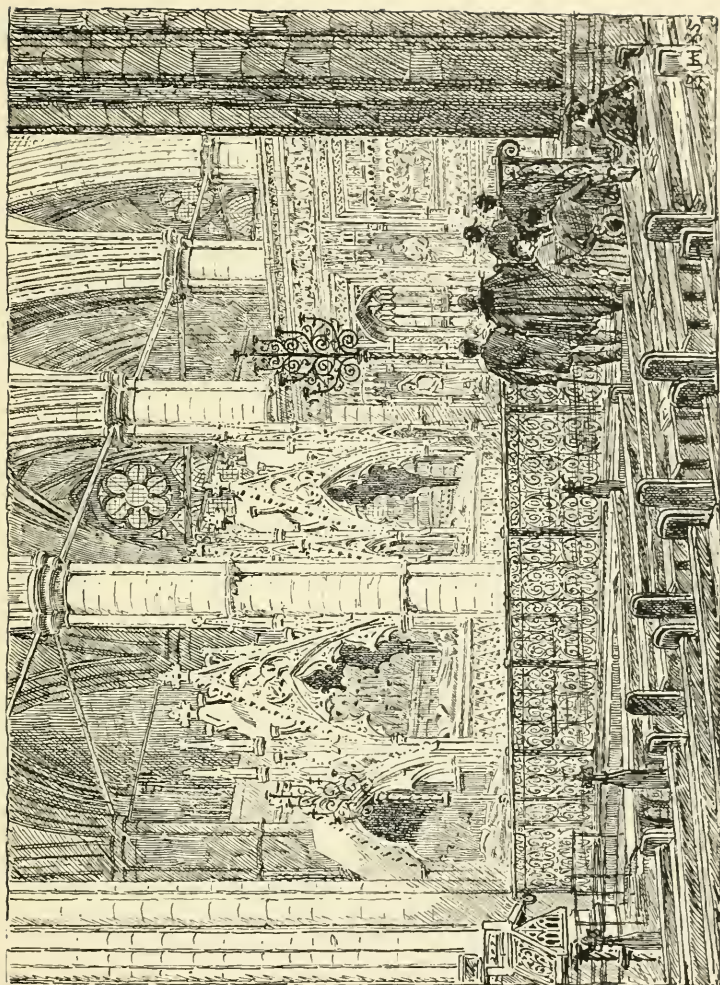
A DARK CORNER.

Entrance to South Aisle of Henry VII.'s Chapel.



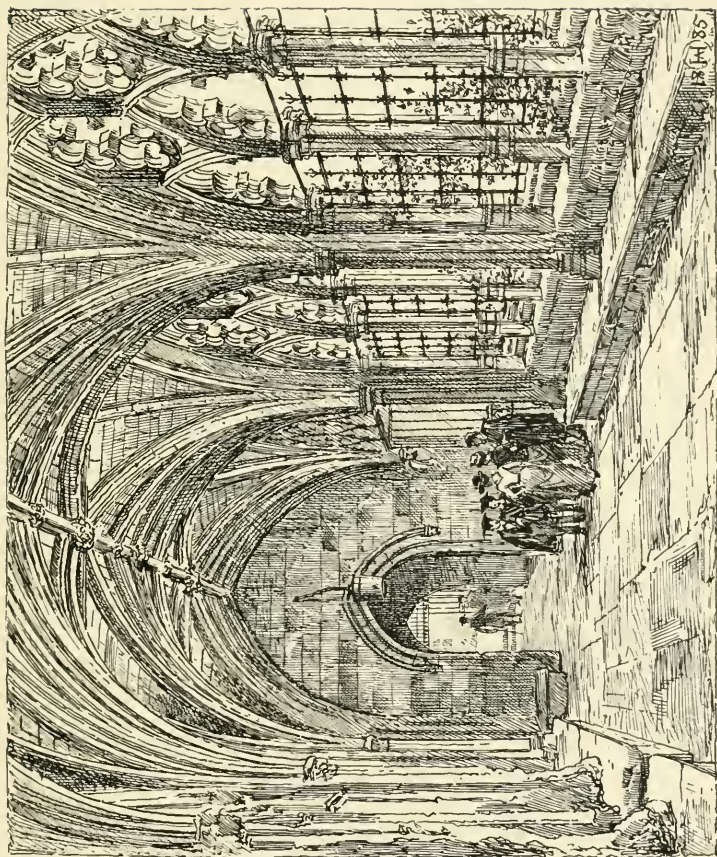
Size $7\frac{1}{2}$ in. \times 12 in.

POETS' CORNER.



Size 11 in. X 8 in.

VIEW OF CHANCEL FROM SOUTH TRANSEPT.



Size $9\frac{3}{4}$ in. X 8 in.

THE CLOISTERS.

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